Queer, Anti-Zionist, & Jewish: Reimagining Jewish Identity through Queer Politics

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Certification of Approval

I certify that I have read Queer, Anti-Zionist, & Jewish: Reimagining Jewish Identity through Queer Politics by Lauren Elizabeth Matt, and that in my opinion this work meets the criteria for approving a thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree Master of Arts in Human Sexuality Studies at San Francisco State University.

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Abstract

Zionism, the belief in the need for a Jewish nation state in Palestine, as well as the cultural manufacturing required to justify Israeli settler-colonial state violence enacted on Palestinian people, is a hegemonic norm among American Judaism. Zionism is entrenched within American Jewish community and culture, and deeply informs notions of American-Jewish belonging. Drawing from scholarship that makes explicit cis-heteronormative power structures within Zionist hegemony, this exploratory study investigates if and how queerness (both in regards to sexuality and gender) informs American Jews' politicization processes towards anti-Zionist politics. I use qualitative methods of focus groups and interviews with an intergenerational sample, and with participants who self-identify as queer, Jewish, and anti-Zionist, to better understand how participants arrived at their marginal, anti-Zionist positions. This research visibilize participant's, "pathways to politicization," from hegemonic Zionism, to their position and politics of anti-Zionism. Drawing from Black Feminist Thought social research paradigms to particularly focus on how the *interaction* of participant's queer and Jewish identities opened up different modes of relating to Judaism and Zionism, I outline different acts through which participants "queer" their Judaism to align it with anti-Zionism. The research ends with a discussion of organizing implications for Jewish anti-Zionist movement work, and suggestions for future qualitative research in regards to sexuality, gender, Zionism, and anti-Zionism, as a necessary contribution to organizing strategies to end Israeli occupation of Palestine.

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I hope this thesis is an opening and beginning, and I can't wait to see what & where it will bring me into next!

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Introduction

> Herein lies a pathway to decolonization, not predicated on the physical removal of the settlers, but on the transformation of the settlers, who must shed their claim to be owners of the land. Who must recognize their arrival as the conquest it was and not the redemption they had hoped; and who must change their relationship to the land and its Indigenous people from one of superior "masters" to that of cohabitants with native Palestinians in the valleys and on the hilltops and flatlands and coastlines, where they belong.
>
> - Noura Erakat, 2021, "Radical Imagination and Palestine" in *A Land With A People: Palestinians and Jews Confronting Zionism*

As an Ashkenazi Jew raised in Zionism, I was taught to understand Israel as my ancestral home. My Jewish upbringing was shaped by stories of unimaginable survival that led to me being alive, despite all efforts to end my family line. Each recounting of antisemitic persecution was meant to strengthen my Jewish identity to Israeli nationhood - a Jewish "safe-haven" that my ancestors could have only dreamed of. I was a fish swimming in Zionist water, unaware of other possibilities for Jewish safety, and without language, information, or knowledge to question normalized violence inherent to Zionism. This Zionist reality was all sustained by the erasure of Palestine and genocide of Palestinian people that is necessary to maintaining Israeli statehood.

Coming more into racial justice movements in the United States stoked a felt sense of discomfort to my relationship with Zionism as an American Jew, opening up space to question monolithic narratives claiming my right to Israel. Each question was met with an impenetrable Jewish entitlement to Palestinian land, fiercely defended by reactionary intergenerational trauma. Despite having a felt sense of disagreement, I still didn't have the language to understand the

extent of devastating, murderous violence that Israel was perpetrating on Palestine *for* me and in my name. As I came more into social justice politics, I was also coming more into my own queer identity; two increasingly present spheres of myself, which were compartmentalized from being Jewish. As the prospect of centering my future around marrying a "nice Jewish boy," and raising two or three Jewish children in our suburban home felt both irrelevant and oppositional to my embodied desires, I wondered if Judaism could still hold who I was becoming.

I moved to the Bay Area after college, and despite feeling some disconnection, sought Jewish spaces to find community – and was shocked, delighted, and overwhelmed, when each gathering was deeply queer and trans. I couldn't believe how many devout, young Jews I was meeting, all queer and trans, leading shabbat in their homes, rewriting prayers and torah, radicalizing rituals, traditions, and holidays, making visible a long lineage of Jewish anarchism, and entirely re-defining for me what it means to be a Jew. In these diasporic spaces, queerness and Judaism are inherently linked, informing and inseparable from each other - and in these humanizing, justice-oriented communities, Judaism was always anti-Zionist.

Years into this community, my own queerness, and the ongoing formation of my anti-Zionist politics, this project was born of longing to bring more American Jews into anti-Zionism, and by my own personal experiences of transformation by being a part of queer and trans East Bay anti-Zionist Jewish community. The main objectives of this research are to learn more about American Jew's politicization pathways towards anti-Zionist politics over time, and if and how queerness serves a role in this political transformation and on-going arrival. I wanted participants in this research to be intergenerational, to glean more into the role of changing positions and culture in regard to anti-Zionist politicization processes. This research is unique in using

qualitative, sociological methods, in order to center the subjective, lived experiences of an intergenerational group of queer, anti-Zionist Jews as the starting point to generate theory regarding anti-Zionist politicization. This qualitative contribution is in contrast to the breadth of theoretical and historical scholarship on Jewishness, Zionism, sexuality, and anti-Zionism, which is often lacking in including subjective knowledge and lived experiences as central sources of knowledge production and inquiry.

My intention for this research is politically explicit, in wanting to better understand how to bring more American Jews into anti-Zionist organizing, base building, and political movements. As demonstrated by participant's experiences in this research, anti-Zionism can be isolating for Jews who hold those beliefs. However, Zionism is most deadly and harmful for Palestinian people who are subject to Israel's systematically violent apartheid regime. This research is part of an urgent call to wake up from the normalized, devastating violence against Palestinian people and lives that is central to Zionism, and to demand a Judaism that is rooted in the safety and solidarity of all people, while centering those most harmed by the Zionist project. Particularly focusing on the experiences of *queer* anti-Zionist Jews, this thesis unpacks how queerness allows participants to carve out new avenues towards more liberatory politics, changing how they relate to Jewishness itself. Quoting Noura Erakat, a Palestinian-American legal scholar and activist, whose words open this thesis, the following research is intended to be a part of the necessary and direly urgent, "transformation of the [Jewish] settlers, who must shed [our] claim to be owners of the land." (2021: 6). Drawing on Black feminist thought to better understand the openings created specifically through the interaction of intersecting queer and Jewish identities, the following research hopes to visibilize participant's politicization processes

in moving towards anti-Zionism among an intergenerational group of queer, anti-Zionist Jews. This research is intended to aid larger organizing movements in their objectives to bring more people into the necessary transformation required of Jewish settlers, in the US and in Israel, and to refuse notions of Judaism that are contingent on enacting harm, and to move towards a Jewishness meaningfully rooted in a wholeness and humanization for all people. The interactions of queerness and Jewishness are crucial starting points to open up more avenues towards anti-Zionist politicization for all.

Literature Review

Historical Context

Zionism and the Jewish Nation State

Born in response to rampant European antisemitism, Zionism was conceived as a political ideology seeking to convene diasporic global Jewry to form a Jewish nation state. Zionism extends Judaism beyond religion, constructing Jewish people as an ethnicity in need of a nation (Hill and Plitnck, 18: 2020). Following colonial examples of gaining power through nationhood, Zionist thinker Theodore Hertzel explains, “the creation of a new State is neither ridiculous nor impossible” (Herzl 1896). The notion of Jewish statehood was considered inconceivable to a historically diasporic people in the late 18th century, making Zionism initially unpopular among European and global Jewry. However, several Zionist factions formed as Zionism slowly gained popularity throughout the turn of the century alongside increasing European antisemitism. Despite differences in strategy, Zionist ideologies were unified in actualizing a Jewish nation in Palestine - a previously existing state with indigenous people who have lived and are ancestrally rooted for in Palestine generations.

Using religious texts to locate Palestine as a historically Jewish place, the goal of Zionism became to create a Jewish nation *in* Palestine, ultimately intending to use the strategy of settler colonialism to achieve statehood (Hill and Plitnick 2020: 19). Noura Erakat explains, “Zionists sought sovereignty over a land where other people lived. Their ambitions required not only the dispossession and removal of Palestinians in 1948 [in an horrific event known as the Nakba] but also their forced exile, juridical erasure and denial that they ever existed.” (Plitnick and Hill 2020: 19). While grappling with how to conquer Palestinian peoples and their land,

Zionist ideological leader Ze'ev Jabotinsky reflects Erakat's identification of explicit settler colonial logic in his 1923 essay *The Iron Wall*; "there is no such precedent… of colonization being carried on with the consent of the native population... This does not mean that there cannot be any agreement with the Palestine Arabs. What is impossible is a voluntary agreement." (Plitnick and Hill 2020: 28). Though differences in Zionist ideology continued to evolve, the intended settler colonial strategy of Zionism remained a consistent throughline.

As antisemitism and state sanctioned violence against European Jews escalated throughout the 20th century, leading many Jews to escape Europe and immigrate around the world, Zionism became increasingly understood as a means towards Jewish safety through statehood. Antisemitism escalated in Nazi Germany and Europe, amounting to the genocidal holocaust, the systematic genocide of over six million European Jews. The historical and ongoing intergenerational trauma of the holocaust exacerbated collective Jewish desire for statehood among Ashkenazi Jews (Jews of European descent), especially for those living in European nations that supported their genocide, or where they've endured centuries of antisemitism.

The 1917 British Balfour Declaration directly initiated Israel as a settler colonial state in Palestine. While Palestine was still under Ottoman Empire control at the end of the first World War, Britain created the Balfour Declaration, declaring its aim to establish a national home for the Jewish people in Palestine (Tahhan: 2018). Britain gained control of Palestine at the end of the first world war through the British Mandate, succeeding the Ottoman Empire in colonial control of the region. Britain supported Europeans Jews in Palestine and in Europe in preparing for the establishment of Jewish statehood, eventually culminating in the establishment of Israel.

Celebrated as the miraculous initiation of an overdue Jewish state, the 1948 Israeli Independence day is, in Palestine, known as the Nakba - the forced expulsion and massacre of 750,000 Palestinians from their homes and land in order to make way for settlers in the newly claimed Jewish nation.

Settler colonialism is foundational to every step of Jewish nationalism. A primary concern and organizing factor of Zionism, is strategizing how to dominate a people whose land Israel is trying to forcefully seize. Israeli control over Palestinian land has been an ongoing Nakba, the continuous, forced exile of Palestinians from their lands and home since 1948. The violent displacement of Palestinian people that Israeli statehood relies on is contorted within Zionist narratives to support Jewish safety.

In the context of the holocaust and of a long history of antisemitism, many Jewish people direly associated statehood as the only means towards Jewish safety and survival. The desire for safety through statehood was born in response to centuries of violent, European rooted antisemitism. Trauma responses such as this one, though legitimate in origin, can lead communities to cause more harm in the pursuit of their own safety. Recognizing the very real experiences of intergenerational Jewish trauma, while simultaneously turning *towards* the harm and violence enacted on Palestinians through Jewish statehood, rather than using that trauma to justify Israeli state violence, is essential to meaningfully discontinue cycles of harm. Through an investigation of both Zionism and anti-Zionism, this thesis is concerned with recognizing the role of Jewish trauma in fostering Jewish desire for statehood, while simultaneously refusing Zionist narratives that utilize Jewish trauma to justify horrific Israeli state violence enacted on Palestinian peoples. This thesis is urgently concerned with dispelling harmful Zionist narratives

that falsely positions Jewish safety to be contingent on the violent occupation of Palestinian land and people, and which defends the massacre of Palestinian lives as a legitimate and necessary response to historic antisemitism. Israeli state violence has materially translated to: the forced removal of Palestinian people from their ancestral homes and the disposition of their land; ongoing genocide and daily acts of horrific violence; the ongoing enforcement of an apartheid state; and Gaza becoming unlivable and unsafe for human conditions (Erakat 2016). It is with dire urgency that American Jewish communities, and Zionists in general, recognize the blatancy of this ongoing violence, which is made normal and invisibilized by American and Israeli state powers. Initially conceived as a political ideology towards Jewish nationhood, this thesis understands Zionism as a practice - a set of sustained settler colonial actions that subject Palestinian people to extreme Israeli state violence. Nation-states, especially settler colonial ones, require origin stories, cultural narratives, and artifacts that support its version of reality - one that often relies on the erasure of the indigenous people who are being colonized (Baroudi et. al. 2016). The analysis in this thesis is based in understandings of Zionism as both the militaristic and material violence required to maintain Israeli statehood, as well as the cultural manufacturing that normalizes and invisibilizes Israeli state violence.

Israel and Jewish Belonging

Zionism is a reigning hegemonic norm in Judaism. Jewish liturgy and religious practices are often categorized as reform, conservative, orthodox, and reconstructionist, with the majority of North American Jews belonging to the reform movement. As defined by the Union for Reform Judaism, the religious home for the reform movement of North America, the purpose of Zionism is to, “[establish] a Jewish state in Israel, the homeland of the Jewish people.” (Union

for Reform Judaism 2021). In a sustained effort to make Jewish identity inseparable from Zionism, the official goals of the reform movement are to; "increase each Reform Jew's relationship with Israel and make Israel a core component of every Reform Jew's identity; to recommit the North American Reform Movement to Zionist ideals and leverage our combined resources devoted to the cause, including formally and explicitly identifying the reform movement as a Zionist movement" (Union for Reform Judaism 2021). Since Israel (supported and resourced by imperial Western powers) colonized Palestine in 1948, Jewish identity has become intrinsically linked to Zionism and Israeli nationhood.

In her dissertation, *Fear, Family, and Fantasy: Israel's Significance to American Jews*, Minkin argues that affective relationships to Israel are a pillar in organizing American Jewish belonging. Through a focus on California Bay Area Jewish communities, Minkin explores the, "production of a collective, Jewish identity in relation to the state of Israel" (Minkin 2014: 9) along three axes of correct affective displays of emotion in regards to the Jewish nation state. As religiosity declines in America and fewer Jews are affiliated with synagogues, Jewish Organizations become the central arbiters of power in creating the boundaries of belonging for Jewish community (Minkin 2014). Through the production of Jewish identity via Jewish Organizations, US Jews define their Jewish identity through: correct affective displays of; familial love towards global Jewry and towards Israel; passionate love and fantasy regarding Israel; and fear of annihilation, vulnerability & power amounting to the need for statehood (Minkin 2014: 39). The importance of affective relationships towards Israel specifically serving as *the* determining factor in defining Jewish belonging, demonstrates the centrality of Zionism in contemporary American Judaism.

As a positive identification with and relationship to Zionism is central in determining who is considered within the parameters of contemporary American Judaism itself, we must understand how Zionism (as created by Jewish organizations, US and Israeli state governments, and reproduced in American Jewish culture) intersects with and folds other identity positions into its ideology, in order to maintain and produce a collective Jewish identity. The following analysis unpacks how Zionism relies on corrective norms regarding gender, sexuality, and race, in order to maintain its regulatory and reigning power among American Jewish communities.

Zionism and Identity Practices

Zionism and White Supremacy

As an explicitly settler-colonialist ideology created by European Jews, the othering and then villainization of Arab peoples at large, and particularly of Palestinians, who are framed as a dire threat to Jewish safety, is central to legitimizing the need for a Jewish state. Understanding antisemitism as a product of white-supremacy is crucial to meaningful Jewish liberation and the liberation of all peoples. Houria Bouteldja's (2016) work, *Whites, Jews, and Us*, urgently implores Jewish people to become aware of our violent subjection *by* white supremacy. By wrongly citing Arab peoples as the source of antisemitism, Jewish people continue to remain pawns of white-supremacy - the same white-supremacy which we very recently almost did not survive. Bouteldja (2016) asserts that antisemitism is specific in its geographic origin, in that it is *European*: purporting antisemitism as stateless allows for the justification of Zionism, and subsequently positions Jewish people to buy into a false notion of safety that serves white-supremacist imperial powers, *with Israel becoming one itself.* Bouteldja warns and makes clear to a Jewish audience that in accepting Zionism, White-supremacist western imperialism,

"managed to make you trade your religion, your history, and your memories for a colonial ideology. You abandoned your Jewish, multi-secular identities - you've entirely given yourself over to a Zionist identity" (Bouteldja 2016: 57). Anti-Zionism, then, becomes a key point of confrontation for Jewish people to choose liberation and solidarity, as opposed to being used by white-supremacy, the same white-supremacy in which we, like the Arab and Palestinian peoples we enact violence on, will never become, "the legitimate body of" (Bouteldja: 2016).

Zionist Gender and Reproduction

Zionism encourages the construction of Jewish subjectivity tied to cisnormative, heterosexual gender roles. Imbuing Jewish belonging with notions of familial love, Zionist gender norms coerce cis-women to become mothers, producing the next generation of Jewish children to maintain Jewish survival in Israel, and among global Jewry at large. Minkin explores how the metaphor of family is central in governing correct emotional displays towards global Jewish populations, with love of Israel determining one's love towards their global Jewish family. Sociologists of emotion explore familial love as distinct, with its own specific requirements and feeling rules (Minkin: 2014). Compared to other displays of love, familial love is measured through affective performances of obligation, mutual responsibility, and loyalty towards the family unit. Among Jewish community, the notion of *Ahavat Yisrael*, or love of Jew people, utilizes requirements of familial love in order to prove one's love of Jewish people as a larger Jewish family. Minkin argues that, *Ahavat Yisrael*, has become directly equated with love for the state of Israel; to love Israel is to love your Jewish family, and that love must be displayed through loyalty, mutual responsibility, and obligation to the state (Minkin 2014: 36). Imbuing

notions of Jewish belonging with rules of familial love, implicitly genders Zionist identity production.

As a project to create a Jewish nation, Zionism is explicitly gendered, as nationality is always inseparable from gender. Using the metaphor of family to describe the Jewish relationship to Israel, Minkin elaborates how within the nation as family, binary gender roles become naturalized: "for the nation, as in 'the family,' the ideology brings assumptions about proper behavior and proper roles, which are made to seem as natural as the love one is assumed to feel for parents, children, or the greater nation." (Minkin 2014: 40). Minkin continues, "through this ideology [of fellow Jews and Israel as family], a structural arrangement that promotes male dominance and female subordination is made to seem natural, necessary, and desirable for the functioning of a society." (Minkin 2014: 40). The Knesset, the Israeli governmental body, defines parameters of Jewish belonging in part through notions of maternal bloodline, reifying women's subordinate role within gender dynamics of reproductive hypermasculinity. Knesset legislation qualifies being a Jew as, in part, "a person who was born of a Jewish mother." (Knesset, The State of Israel: 2003). As a central legitimizing factor of Jewishness is being born by a Jewish mother, and since being Jewish automatically guarantees Israeli citizenship, Judaism being contingent on one's maternal bloodline ties cis-heteronormativity to the Israeli nation-state. A woman's role within the Jewish family is to bear children, continuing Jewish prosperity while creating more settlers necessary to maintain Israel's settler colonial rule. As a settler colonial project, Zionism relies on the family as a central structure to maintain an ongoing settler relationship.

Within her text, *Israel/ Palestine and the Queer International*, Sarah Schulman elaborates on corrective woman gender roles serving to support the Jewish nation state. While meeting with Israeli queers, Shulman quotes Tal, an Israeli anti-occupation lesbian, on her reflections of normative gender roles in Israel. Tal and her friend explain,

> "that's why motherhood is everything here," Tal said. "You can't ever have a real role here [as a woman] unless you have children, because mothers produce soldiers, and that is what the country wants." "Even more," J said. "Mothers are valued because they create soldiers, but also because they create Jews" (Schulman 2012: 70).

Jewish women are necessary for the creation of more Jews, both to populate the settler power with more settlers, and to continue the livelihood of the Jewish people, or Jewish family, at large, and particularly in the homeland of Israel. Minkin elaborates that an organizing fear of the larger Jewish global "family" is Jewish disappearance in part through, "fading away," through a decline in inter-Jewish marriage, and therefore, a decline in Jewish population through reproduction. In this way, Zionist "woman" gender norms are organized in response to the fear of Jewish vulnerability; women must ensure Jewish power in response to the threat of disappearance by creating more Jewish people. Women subjects whose desires fall outside of reproduction in a cis-heteronormative context may feel subjective dissonance from the state. In order to uphold reproductive notions of heteronormative Zionist womanhood, Zionism simultaneously valorizes reproductive heteromasculinity through the production of corrective gender norms for Jewish men. As gender systems operate in binary terms (Thorne: 1982), Zionist male gender roles are intended to masculinize effeminate Jewish men, in order to align them with a masculinity that supports nationhood (Boyarin: 1997).

Zionist Hypermasculinity

Zionist gender norms regulate and produce Jewish cis-masculinity to align with militaristic violence needed to maintain Jewish statehood and nationalistic notions of safety. Talmudic scholar Daniel Boyarin makes explicit the process of Zionism enforcing European, colonial gender norms upon diasporic Ashkenazi Jewish men, in order to bring them into nationalistic notions of heterosexuality. In order to index the current militaristic violence inherent to Zionist masculinity, Boyarin unveils normative Ashkenazi masculinity prior to the creation of a Jewish state. Marked as inherently othered within European cultures, Ashkenazi Jewish gender norms were distinct from European ones. Boyarin (1997) argues that ideal manhood in late 19th century Askhenazi culture amounted to being soft spoken, studious, gentle, and often remaining in the home and private sphere. Though not absolved from sexism and misogyny, Jewish masculinity was never measured through enacting domination and violence on non-Jewish populations. Ashkenazi masculinity was entirely unintelligible through the lens of dominant Christian European society and culture. European leaders considered Jewish men so far outside the boundaries of manhood, that they were made intelligible only through homosexuality (Boyrain: 1997), which was, at the time, primarily understood as a transgression of correct gender norms (Vance: 1991). As antisemitic state sanctioned violence increased throughout the turn of the century in Europe, eventually amounting to the genocidal holocaust, Jewish leaders aligned with antisemitic rhetoric in blaming Jewish people for their own passivity and weakness in allowing this unimaginable, extreme violence to happen. Zionism was intended to bring emasculated Jewish subjects into heterosexual notions of colonial masculinity in order to be “real men” who are capable of defending themselves and their nation (Boyarin: 1997). While considering Ashkenazi gender norms that rendered Jewish men effeminate, passive, and

homosexual through the European gaze, Zionist leaders explicitly looked to Zionism to bring Jewish men into nationalistic colonial notions of heteronormative masculinity, to create stronger Jewish men in order that can maintain and initiate safety through Jewish statehood. Heteronormativity and the binary gender roles required to maintain it, are then foundational to Zionism and maintaining the state of Israel.

Similar to Jewish womanhood, Zionist masculinity is also organized in response to fears of annihilation and vulnerability. The pressure to be "good" Jewish men and women along these lines - creating a Jewish family in the context of a Jewish marriage, displaying familial love and support for Israel, living in fear of Jewish annihilation, and staunchly defending the necessity for statehood in response to it - all inform subjective experiences of Ashkenazi American Jews through constructing parameters of Jewish belonging. Queer sexuality and gender performances may create a subjective sense of disconnection from Zionist Jewish gender norms. Though gay subjectivity can viscerally position American Jews away from Zionism, homosexuality is increasingly used to strengthen Zionist power, and is simultaneously formulated into notions of nationalistic Jewish belonging.

Sexuality and Zionism

Homonationalism & Pinkwashing

Though queerness has historically positioned some American Jews away from identification with Israeli nationalism (Lober: 2018), Zionist power - enforced through Jewish organizations, and the US and Israeli governments - has shifted nationalist formulations to fold homosexuality into notions of Zionist-Jewish belonging. Through an investigation of how sexuality, race, and class factors into notions of nationalistic belonging, Jasbir Puar (2007)

describes the phenomenon of homonationalism. Whereas homosexual subjects were previously excluded from formulations of American nationalism and national belonging, Puar notes a meaningful shift in which certain gay subjects (white, cis-men), were folded into nationalistic structures. Puar names the absorbing of previously non-normative sexualities into the American nation-state as "homonationalism," or national homosexuality (Puar: 2007).

Exceptionalism is a core tenant of homonationalism. The United States, and other imperial, Western nations who adopt homonationalist politics, exert power through exceptionalism in several ways. First, homonationalist powers claim the inclusion of specific gay subjects within their nationalist formations as proof of their exceptionally democratic and tolerant nations. This exceptional positioning is then used to other nations and peoples (specifically Arab and Muslim peoples) who are deemed as un-democratic and unsafe through their perceived lack of inclusion of homosexual subjects in their nationalist formulations, marking them as terrorists. Once the "homophobic" other has been identified, homonationalist powers use their inclusion of gay subjects as justification to act *in exception* of the rule of law, in order to protect their exceptionally vulnerable, democratic and liberal nations.

Similar to the US, Israel utilizes homonationalism to aid in the justification of its exceptionally violent governance on Palestinian peoples. Zionist powers include certain homosexual Jewish subjects into Israeli notions of the nation state. This inclusion is reflected in the subjective experiences of gay Zionists - folks with queer sexualities who maintain strong, positive identification with the state of Israel. Homonationalism in Israel has been widely documented through Pinkwashing (BDS: 2023). Through the inclusion of certain (white and Jewish) homosexual subjects into Israel's nationalist formulations through the creation of gay

rights such as the right to marriage, Israel purports itself as exceptionally democratic and progressive, especially in comparison to its othered, Arab surrounding nations. Israel uses this inclusion of gay subjects in the form of gay rights to deny claims of its oppressive and violent occupation of Palestine (BDS: 2023). Following homonationalist logic, Israel uses the inclusion of certain queer subjects to enact exceptionally violent militaristic power on Palestinian peoples. As Israel unequivocally and strategically uses certain gay subjects to enact exceptional harm on Palestinian peoples, some queer Jewish and Israeli subjects fall outside of state accepted notions of gayness. While considering which gay subjects are excluded from Israel's homonationalist formations of nation-aligned gay identity, Solomon argues that the fault lines of LGBT organizing in Israel that lands subjects either in alignment with queer liberation or gay assimilation (homonationalism), uncoincidentally falls along notions of gender and sexuality. In order to be gay and Zionist, one must align with ideals of the Zionist nation, which Solomon argues is hypermasculine, and most tolerant of white, Jewish, gay men. Though there are queer Jewish subjects of all sexualities and genders who align themselves with Zionism, queer women and trans people tend to historically be leaders in anti-Zionist, anti-occupation, and Israeli peace movements. Solomon observes that queer women and trans people may become non-normative subjects within Israel's homonationalism, with one's affective relationship to Zionism positioning them as within or outside of nationalistic oriented gay sexualities.

Sexuality, Zionism, and WLM

Women, queer and trans people who experience dissonance from the gender binary required to uphold Zionist gender norms may feel a subjective sense of mis-belonging from normative Zionist Judaism. This becomes evident in the historic and current leadership of

lesbian/queer and feminist political groups, both in Israel and the US, in leading anti-occupation organizing among Ashkenazi Jewish communities. In her article, *Narrow Bridges: Jewish Lesbian Feminism, identity politics, and the "hard ground" of alliance*, Brooke Lober (2018) proposes a connection between Lesbian subjectivity in Women's Liberation Jewish feminist groups and anti-occupation politics in an American context. In the US 1970s Women's Liberation movement, Jewish feminist politics divided across strategies towards gaining power, in part culminating in differing orientations towards Israel. Zionist Jewish feminists employed "liberal mobilizations of identity politics," utilizing their identity categories of being Jewish and women to gain visibility, state based rights, and representation (Lober 2018: 85).

Through this logic, power is equated with gaining state-based rights and representation, which in turn reifies state power. Following this power formulation, Zionist Jewish feminists understood Israeli sovereignty as a central culmination of power as Jewish women. Zionist Jewish feminists insisted that critique of Israel is antisemitic, understanding it as an attack Jewish sovereignty. Even among contemporary progressive movements anti-Zionism, or any critique of Israeli state violence, is often equated with antisemitism.

Within their piece, *Forgotten "-ism" An Arab American Women's Perspective on Zionism, Racism, and Sexism*, Baroudi et. al. (2016) make evident the invisibilized dominance of Zionist ideology, even and especially among progressive movements. As the invisibilized yet omnipresent "-ism," Zionism allows for the proliferation of racist and sexist notions that profoundly and materially affect Arab women's lives in the United States. Judith Butler elaborates on Zionism as proliferating Jewish hegemony in her work *Parting Ways: Jewishness and the Critique of Zionism*. Butler makes clear that though there are "Jewish resources" of

values and ethics that could be argued as inherently anti-Zionist, that looking to Judaism for strategies towards Palestinian liberation inadvertently reifies Jewish hegemony. Butler explains, "indeed, even the critique of Zionism, if exclusively Jewish, extends Jewish hegemony for thinking about the region and becomes, in spite of itself, part of what we might call the Zionist effect." (Butler 2012: 3). When applied towards feminist politics, the "Zionist effect," supports white-savoir dynamics between American white, Ashkenazi Jewish women and othered, Arab women subjects. Based in notions of homonationalism, (Puar: 2007) Arab American women are subject to false narratives that they remain in a perpetual state of victimhood, and therefore in need of saving by the exceptionally liberal and democratic United States (Baroudi et. al.: 2016).

Lober continues to explore how lesbianism and queered sexualities affect Jewish feminist organizing, relationships to statehood, and positioning towards solidarity rather than saviorship. Radical Lesbian Jewish feminists employ their Jewish identity differently. By centering their queer sexual experiences to root in an analysis of heteronormativity within their feminist ideology, "Jewish lesbianism consolidated an ethics of relation across difference and dissent against state violence that would place it in proximity with related forms of feminist antiracism." (Lober 2018: 89). Rather than attempting to erase differences across lines of race, class, and nationality towards false notions of equality, Lesbian centric Jewish Feminism was concerned with naming and transforming conditions that inequitably form the material circumstances of women's lives, by explicitly centering race, class, and imperialism within their feminist analysis (Lober: 2018). Connecting heterosexuality to the maintenance of the nation through ideas of heteronormativity prompted Lesbian Jewish feminists to create a felt sense of separation from the state, rather than seeking equality through identifying with the nation and its individualistic,

rights-based mechanics towards gaining relative power. In turn, this form of feminism attempts to disrupt antisemitism, as it connects to intersecting violent systems of white-supremacy, and uses Jewish identity to orient subjects towards solidarity of all oppressed peoples. Compared to homosexual and/or feminist Jewish subjects who seek to gain power through identification with the state, these queer subjects employ their sexual positions to subjectively root in solidarity politics.

Queer Anti-Zionism

By creating space through relational opposition to the Zionist norm, anti-Zionism may queer Judaism. While summarizing foundational ideas in queer theory, Annamarie Jagose offers several interpretations of the ever illusive "queer." Defined by its unintelligibility, "queer," fundamentally destabilizes fixed notions of identity; "by refusing to crystallise in any specific form, queer maintains a relation of resistance to whatever constitutes the normal." (Jagose 99: 1996). Jagose elaborates that queer can be mobilized to encompass a relational opposition extending past gender and sexuality; "queer may be used to describe an open-ended constituency, whose shared characteristic is not identity itself but an anti-normative positioning." (Jagose 98: 1996). Queerness, as a verb (queering Judaism), as an anti-normative positioning (anti-Zionism), and as a felt subjective gendered and sexual experience, destabilizes heteronormative-Zionist identity as, "something fixed, coherent and natural." (Jagose 98: 1996). Exposing Zionism as distinct allows for the urgent and dire separation of Judaism from Zionism, enabling Jews to assert our faith while refusing Zionism, and therefore Israel, as "natural" aspects Judaism itself. In this thesis, anti-Zionism is broadly defined as the intentional, relational

positioning of being in opposition to the Israeli occupation of Palestine, and against the settler colonial project of Zionism and Jewish nationalism.

In response to heteronormative and homonationalism notions of statehood, Jewish scholars utilize queerness to destabilize the nation, and move towards diaspora. In response to the hyper-masculinity and heteronormativity inherent to Zionism, Boyarin argues that diaspora, or Judaism severed from a longing for and organization around statehood, becomes queer: "diaspora is essentially queer, and an end to Diaspora would be the equivalent of becoming straight" (Boyarin 1997: 231). Schulman continues to imbue notions of queerness with opposition to statehood within her identification of the queer international. In response to homonationalist formulations of acceptable gay identity that align homosexuality with patriotism and statehood, Schulman dreams of the queer international as, "a kind of spiritual place, a queer place with no land or borders that hovered above straight people's geography… a worldwide movement that brings queer liberation and feminism to the principles of international autonomy from occupation, colonialism, and globalized capital. The newest, broadest movement for freedom for all on this earth" (Schulman 2012: 66).

Gaps in the Literature

Zionism relies on cis-heteronormativity and homonationalism to maintain the Jewish nation state, imbuing notions of Jewish belonging with gender and sexuality performances that align with Israeli nationalism. Zionist political leaders were explicit in using Israeli statehood to create gender norms for white, Ashkenazi, Jews that align with militaristic violence, and seek safety through reproduction, and securing Israel on Palestinian land as the surest means to confront exceptional Jewish vulnerability. Though Zionism has become embedded within

affective and subjective experiences of Jewish belonging, Jews have simultaneously always resisted the need for a Jewish nation state as the central means towards Jewish safety, as well as that nation state being in Palestine.

As Zionism has become a hegemonic norm in global and American Judaism, this analysis in part aims to investigate how American Jewish subjects arrive to the anti-normative, and often isolated position of anti-Zionism. Following scholarship that documents Jewish anti-occupation work being led by lesbians and suggests that queer and trans Jewish people who fall outside of Israel's homonationalist formulations might feel visceral dissonance from Jewish belonging and Zionism, this research specifically investigates the experiences of subjects who self identify queer (on the premise of gender and sexuality), Jewish, and anti-Zionist, to better understand if and how queerness is subjectively experienced as a part of their politicization process towards anti-Zionism. This research fills the gap of qualitative research on Jewish subjective experiences in politicizing towards anti-Zionism, while explicitly investigating how experiences of non-normative gender and sexuality are implicated within this process. This thesis examines; This research asks; if Zionism organizes Jewish gender and sexuality to regulate and condition Jewish populations in Israel and beyond to align with the state, how is gender and sexuality implicated within anti-Zionism? What can we learn from queer, Jewish subjects paths towards anti-Zionism, in order to break down Zionist hegemony, and bring more American Jews into anti-Zionist movement and organizing?

Though still marginal, anti-Zionism is increasingly becoming popularized. This research also investigates what anti-Zionist positioning means to queer, Jewish subjects. In other words, when do folks identify as anti-Zionist? What prompts queer, Jewish subjects to include anti-

Zionism within their identities and positionality? What are the consequences and effects of anti-Zionist positioning becoming an identity, and how is this implicated within queer identity? This research intends to fill the gap of how gender and sexuality are implicated within the subjective experiences of people who self identify as queer, Jewish, and anti-Zionist. The following analysis offers a subjective lens of how anti-Zionist, queer, American Jews make sense of their own intersectional position across these lines of position and identity, in the context of little qualitative and subjective research across these identity lines.

Methodology

Research Questions and Overview

To gain a deeper understanding of connections between queerness and anti-Zionist politics and identity formation among American Jews, I designed a qualitative study to explore the following research questions: how does queerness serve to inform and disrupt American Jews' relationship to Zionism and Israeli nationalism? How is queer sexuality a part of anti-Zionist consciousness raising for American Jews over-time? How does queerness affect anti-Zionist Jews' understandings of safety, and how do altered notions of safety inform anti-Zionist politics? To answer these questions, I collected qualitative data using focus groups and interviews held in January and February of 2023, both in person in the East Bay of the San Francisco Bay Area and held virtually over Zoom.

I specifically chose focus groups to better examine how participants make sense of these identities subjectively and relationally, and to foster a sense of Jewish anti-Zionist queer community. Being queer and anti-Zionist are both marginal positions within the larger context of American and Jewish cultural norms (Minkin 2014). Madriz (836:1998) writes that, "focus groups' uniquely support inquiry into the subjective experiences of women and marginalized peoples' lives towards social change." Given the marginality of these positions, I chose focus groups as the central data collection method for this research to facilitate space for participants to form connections over shared experience as a means to decrease the potential of isolation and for participants to feel and build connections with other queer, anti-Zionist Jews. This research is explicitly political by intending to contribute to a strategy of how to bring more American Jews into anti-Zionism. Due to their ability to deepen relationships and connection among

marginalized people, focus groups, more so than interviews, uniquely support inquiry towards social change (Madriz 1998). I recruited participants who self-identify as queer, anti-Zionist, and Jewish, in order to understand how participants make meaning of and experience the interaction of these specific positions. All following study procedures were approved by the SFSU IRB.

Participant Recruitment & Positionalities

Participant Pool

The participant pool for this research is people who self identify as queer, Jewish, and anti-Zionist. When recruiting people for the study, I intentionally did not provide definitions for any of these qualifying terms in order to better understand how participants make meaning of these identities and positions within their own lives. My choice of the word, "queer," was used as a non-specific umbrella term to describe a wide range of genders and sexualities that fall outside of cis-heternormative binary positions. In order to address the research question of how queer sexuality is a part of anti-Zionist consciousness raising *over time*, the participant pool is intentionally intergenerational, meaning there is no qualifying age-rage (aside from being over 18 years old) to participate within the study. Using Black Feminist Thought modes of sociological inquiry as described by Patricia Hill Collins, the participant pool is specific in limiting potential participants to folks who self-identify as queer, Jewish, and anti-Zionist, in order to "develop new theoretical interpretations of the interaction itself" of these specific positions, rather than researching any one of them in isolation (Collins 21:1986). Within the context of the overarching research questions, this study is designed to inquire into the *interaction* of these specific social positions, in order to better understand the role of queer sexuality in affecting relationships to Israeli nationalism among American Jews.

Insider Status & Positionality

As described in the Introduction section in this thesis, I am an insider within Jewish anti-Zionist community in the East Bay. The Bay Area, and particularly the East Bay, has a thriving and abundant Jewish anti-Zionist political and spiritual community, largely led and populated by queer and trans people. Since moving to Oakland in the Fall of 2018, I've been a part of and enmeshed within the web of East Bay queer, anti-Zionist Jewish spaces. Though the ways I've plugged in have changed, ebbed and flowed over the years, this community has formed and organized my life in the Bay Area, both politically and interpersonally. Therefore, I am both a part of East Bay anti-Zionist Jewish community, as well as sharing the qualifying identities and political positions of being queer, Jewish, and anti-Zionist, with the participants in this research. Both position me as an insider within this research and among the participants in this study.

While describing the utility of strategically utilizing one's ethnographic toolkit, Victoria Reyes defines being an insider as, "those who study populations similar to themself." (Reyes 222: 2020). Reyes describes how both visible (race, gender), and invisible (social capital, education status), components of researchers' positionalities inform how they gain access to and interact with participants, as well as how they interpret data (Reyes 225: 2020). Using a process of reflexivity to become aware of one's visible and invisible positions can help researchers strategically use them as tools, to both establish trust among participants, and to better understand how one social positions of power and oppression informs the total research process. Being an insider within queer, anti-Zionist Jewish East Bay community shaped my methodological choices and greatly informed and established my access to the participant pool

for this research. I strategically disclosed certain invisible and visible positions to gain access to participants throughout the recruitment and data collection processes.

Participant Recruitment

Drawing from my insider position, I primarily used purposive and snowball sampling to recruit participants for this study. all study procedures were approved by the SFSU IRB. Purposive sampling indicates selecting participants who have specific attributes that are appropriate to the study (such as identity position) (Bell et. al. 373: 2022). while snowball sampling is when, "the researcher makes initial contact with a small group of people connected to the research topic and then uses them to establish contact with others" (Bryman et al. 374: 2022). Both purposive and snowball sampling are types of non-probability sampling, meaning that the process of finding participants is "non-random," in which some populations are more likely to be selected than others, while the overall process remains systematic (Bell et. al. 372: 2022). Using purposive sampling, I recruited a participant pool of people who self-identify as queer, Jewish, and anti-Zionist by sending emails to various progressive and leftist Jewish groups and email listservs that I am a part of. I also employed snowball sampling to ask people I know to send my recruitment message by email to various leftist and anti-Zionist Jewish groups that I am not personally a part of. During recruitment of my sample using these two sampling methods, I sent my recruitment message to four distinct groups, all of which are mixed age and intergenerational. Three of the groups were East Bay and Bay Area specific, and one includes a Bay Area audience, but is national Jewish listserv. One of the groups is affiliated with an pro-Palestinian contingent of an East Bay Synogogue, and one is a Bay Area chapter of a formal anti-Zionist Jewish organizing group. I also used snowball sampling to reach out to individuals,

asking them to connect me with people who they thought might be interested in participating in the research, and to recruit participants in person at a new member meeting for an Jewish anti-Zionist organization in the East Bay. None of the groups I recruited from explicitly identify as or are intended for queer and trans people (which is a primary concern of this research), but many of the people in these various groups are queer and trans. All of the individual people I reached out to while utilizing snowball sampling are queer. In my recruitment messaging, I disclosed my identities and positions of being queer, Jewish, and anti-Zionist to establish myself as an insider within topics, and in order to build trust among potential participants as someone who is researching marginal positions of being both anti-Zionist Jewish and queer.

Participant Sample & Limits of my Positionality

The participant sample had fifteen people. Thirteen of the fifteen participants live in the East Bay, one lives in San Francisco, and one lives in Durham, North Carolina. The participant sample is intergenerational, and is composed of people ranging from 22 - 75 years old. In regards to gender, almost all participants are women, non-binary, and trans, while one participant is a cis-man. Many participants described their sexuality as "queer," with several participants specifically identifying as lesbians, and one participant identified as gay.

My position of being white and Ashkenazi Jewish (meaning European Jewish ancestry and cultural traditions) influenced the racial demographic of participants in the study, by informing which Jewish communities I am an insider within; every participant in the study is white. Fourteen participants are Ashkenazi, and one is a Russian Jew. Being white and Ashkenazi informs which Jewish communities I am an insider within; most of my Jewish community in the East Bay shares these racial and cultural positions. The participant pool in this

research being all white, and almost all Ashkenazi, makes clear the role of whiteness and Ashkenazi centered cultural norms in shaping American Jewish spaces. This centering of Ashkenazi Jewish culture contributes to the erasure of the vast and varied cultural, ethnic, and racial Jewish communities both in the United States, and among global Jewish populations. Given both skewed participant demographics, such as all of the participants being white, as well as the sample size, the following study is exploratory and not generalizable research. Rather than intending to make generalizable conclusions about identities and populations included within the study, this research aims to generate questions about emerging phenomena and themes regarding sexuality, queerness, and Jewish anti-Zionism among American Jews (Bell et. al. 370: 2022), and specifically gleans information from the experiences of white, mainly Ashkenazi Jewish people. BIPOC Jewish people, and Jewish people with different cultural and ethnic backgrounds may relate Zionism, anti-Zionism, US and Israeli nationalism differently. Research investigating the experiences of Mizrahi Jews specifically, and BIPOC Jews more broadly, are critical, and could do particularly important work to break down Zionism - a system deeply entangled with white-supremacy.

Data Collection: Research Ethics, Focus Groups, & Interviews

Research Ethics: Confidentiality and Informed Consent

While conducting focus groups and interviews (explained in the proceeding sections), I gained participant's informed consent to best ensure that participation in the study was voluntary and non-coercive, and ensured their confidentiality and privacy by using the following measures. At the start of each focus group and interview, I gave each participant a copy of the informed consent form, and we went through the information within it together. I gave participants time to

read the form and ask me questions before signing two copies, one which each participant kept, and one which they returned to me. The consent form explains that throughout the entire research process, I will be the only person who has access to their name and any identifying information. For the virtual meetings, participants signed their consent forms virtually, after which I printed out the signed consent forms and then deleted the virtual copies, in order to protect participant privacy and confidentiality. Later, while transcribing the focus group and interview recordings, and while writing the analysis, I used pseudonyms for all participants. All participant names used in this thesis at every stage of writing are pseudonyms.

The consent form includes participants' right to stop participating within the study at any time, both during the interviews and focus groups, and that they can request to retract their contributions afterwards. I explained this aspect of their participation clearly and provided verbal and written instructions for how to contact me to retract their contributions to the study.

Focus Groups

I held three focus groups across the span of two months, in January and February of 2023. The first focus group had five participants, the second had six, and the third had three. The first two focus groups were held in person in an East Bay progressive synagogue, which generously donated their space for me to use, while the third focus group was held virtually over Zoom. The Zoom focus group was initially unplanned and unfolded organically: several participants responded to the recruitment messages who were unable to meet in person, and inquired if meeting virtually was an option; this study being exploratory grants flexibility in making that type of amendment. Holding a virtual focus group made participation more accessible in general, and in the context of our ongoing pandemic, while having an

intergenerational participant pool with varying access needs. The in-person focus groups were held in an ADA wheelchair accessible space, and I required that participants wear masks throughout the duration of the meeting (and to meet this requirement, provided masks.)

I followed grounded theory research paradigms to craft overarching research questions, guide the trajectory of my research process, and to inform the structure and questions in the focus groups and interviews (Charmaz 500: 2004). In accordance with this research paradigm, my questions for the focus groups were broad, semi-structured, theme oriented, and open-ended. Before starting to ask questions, I told each group that my intention was for the focus group to be conversational, and that though I might guide and reorient the discussion, I encouraged them to speak with each other without waiting for my prompting. Drawing from feminist research paradigms (Lafrance & Wigginton: 2019), I also emphasized that while living in interconnected power systems, their lived experiences provide meaningful information about how those power systems work and are formed. I shared that as a researcher, I'm interested in how they all make meaning of their experiences, and view their lived knowledge as holding incredibly valuable and important information.

To begin the questions, I started with asking about their general identity positions and themes relating to those identities, and then moved on to more specific questions, all while holding space for participants to interject their own questions and comments to the group.
I used what participants shared from the first focus group, including their feedback on the experience and my facilitation, to guide and inform both the structure and questions of the proceeding focus groups. I used emergent themes from the first focus group to determine the next set of guiding concepts in order to serve as a starting point for the next focus group, and so

on. Following grounded theory principles, I engaged in simultaneous data collection and analysis (Charmaz 500: 2004), using participants' collective meaning-making and experiences to guide the theoretical work and findings. Adapting the questions between focus groups based on the information participants shared is in accordance with grounded theory research principles, in which the data itself steers the direction of the research and theoretical findings generated from it, rather than using the data to prove or disprove a hypothesis (Charmaz 500: 2004). Following each focus group, I took field notes describing emergent themes, quotes participants said that stuck out to me, and the flow of how the conversation went and the order of my questions.

An unexpected outcome of the focus groups was that almost every participant shared that the experience of connecting with intergenerational queer, anti-Zionist Jews, and getting to share in story-telling and learn about changed perspectives and experiences overtime, was highly meaningful, and some even described the experience as healing. This feedback felt affirming of my use of feminist research practices, and was an intention for using this specific methodology.

Interviews

I used individual interviews as a space to further inquire into emergent themes from the focus groups. Though not a pre-planned methodological choice, I conducted two interviews to inquire specific information while in alignment with the exploratory nature of this research, and in response to questions that arose from a focus group, and to meet the accessibility needs of a participant who preferred it. One interview was with a participant from the first focus group, for whom I had follow up questions with specific information and experiences she brought to the group. As the intention for this research is to generate themes and questions regarding queerness and Jewish anti-Zionism, rather than drawing decisive findings, learning more from her

experiences felt necessary and important. The second individual interview was with a participant who, due to her organizing and scholarship positions, didn't feel as though it was appropriate to be part of a focus group, but who was still interested in being a part of the overall research. This participant has been a leader in and scholar of Jewish anti-Zionist organizing for over thirty years. Again, in the context of exploratory research, including this participant's expertise and experience in a research process intended to develop more questions and starting points for future research seemed appropriate and necessary.

In order to best align with participant's schedules and access needs, one interview was held in person at the participant's home, and the second interview was held over zoom. Both interviews were semi-structured and conversational, and my questions were made in response to information generated in the focus groups, in order to further elaborate on and learn more about specific themes.

Data Analysis: Transcription and Coding

I manually transcribed the focus groups and interviews using Google Docs. I wanted to hear the conversations played back to me, to include the social dynamics and interactions, affect, and emotional quality that were an essential part of the focus groups discussion, while transcribing the data. I enjoyed more intimately knowing these conversations through listening again and transcribing them. For the two zoom meetings, I had an initial transcription from saving the zoom captions, and then went back and listened to the audio to edit the transcription, and to more intimately know the data.

For my first focus group, due to faulty technology, I lost the audio recording of the discussion, and was unable to transcribe it. I used the field notes that I took directly after the

focus group that evening in place of a transcription while coding the data. While coding the transcriptions, first I conducted line-by-line coding (Beck et. al. 372:2022), and then moved to focused coding (Ibid: 372.) I used line-by-line coding to thoroughly categorize the data in order to create codes, and eventually to create themes. The three central and overarching themes I pulled out were, “identity,” “intersecting-identities,” and, “politicization process.” Once I had my codes and themes established, I utilized focused coding to sort through the data-set by each theme, to clarify similarities or differences in content within and across theme, and to understand how participant’s subjective experiences across theme compared to current theoretical understandings and research on Jewish, queer, and anti-Zionist identity, or provided new understandings and information. I then used selective coding to organize data and quotes by subtheme. The following analysis takes an in-depth dive into each theme and subtheme.

Analysis

Introduction

Through an explanation of identity formation processes and the intersection of their queer and Jewish identities, the following analysis explores how participants arrived to their anti-Zionist politics. First, I will establish how anti-Zionism is a marginal political position among participants that often leads to familial and community isolation. I will then explore what I'm calling "pathways to politicization" to discuss various routes and avenues that participants undertook to arrive to their anti-Zionist positioning. The first pathway discussed is proximity to Palestinian people, and to Palestine itself. The second pathway concerns participant's identity positions, particularly the intersection of queer and Jewish identities. I then explore different means and acts through which participants *queer* being Jewish, in order to create avenues towards their anti-Zionist politics. Ultimately, this analysis aims to glean how American Jews arrive to anti-Zionist politics and how queerness is a part of people's subjective politicization processes.

Anti-Zionism and Marginality

Coming Out as Anti-Zionist

Participants often compared their experience of coming out as anti-Zionist with that of coming out as queer - another marginal position and experience they hold, which required a public, and potentially disruptive, acknowledgment, in the context of cis-heteronoamtive family systems. Precisely because Zionism is hegemonic in American Jewish community and culture, arriving to the position of anti-Zionism is intentional, a set of active choices that most participants make. One participant describes, "being Jewish-anti-Zionist is a very particular

experience." Within the context of hegemonic Zionism, in which Zionism is assumed among American Jewish community and populations, several participants compare their experience of coming to anti-Zionism as a coming-out, using the public declaration of queer identity to encapsulate the revealing of this position. Carolyn, a lesbian in her 70s who's been steeped in Bay Area political and anti-Zionist movement work for many decades, draws this comparison: "having to continually come out, over and over, and it doesn't stop, both as a lesbian and as an anti-Zionist." This same sentiment is mirrored by several participants; that publicly claiming this belief system and position is a coming out, akin to the unveiling of coming out as queer. Ben, a 71 year old gay man who grew up in Long Island, and recently moved to the Bay Area from Las Vegas, explained his process, in that "I do think for some of us [claiming anti-Zionism] really is a coming out." This act of, "coming out," in being public facing with one's position regarding Palestine in American Jewish community, demonstrates assumed and normalized Zionism among participants in this study, similarly to the act of coming out as queer, in which straightness is assumed within the dominant paradigm of heteronormativity. Participants had to come out as anti-Zionist precisely because of assumed and normalized Zionism within their families and Jewish community. Comparing coming out as anti-Zionist to coming out as queer demonstrates the marginality that participants experience because of their anti-Zionist positioning. Coming out as anti-Zionist, and publicly declaring this position and politics, marginally positioned participants within their families and communities.

Anti-Zionist Isolation

Anti-Zionism is a marginal position and experience within American Judaism, in which Zionism is normalized and hegemonic. Though elder participants consistently emphasize their

perception of changing social conditions, summarized by Lisa's reflection that, "maybe… in this era it is both easier to be queer and easier to be anti-Zionist," participants simultaneously described community and familial isolation as a central part claiming anti-Zionist politics. Ben explains, "coming out as anti-Zionist…. ended up being much more traumatic [than coming out as gay], because a lot of my family barely talks to me. Uhm, and several of them have cut me off totally. But it was all because of Palestine, not because of being gay." Allie, a younger queer person in their 20s, echo's Ben's sentiment, while explaining how being critical of Israel was the catalyst for an ongoing fight with their extended close family members, amounting to their aunt calling them a, "bad Jew," and still refusing to engage in conversation. This disagreement has lasting implications on Allie's relationship with their family members, causing ongoing division and isolation.

Several participants responded to this anti-Zionist isolation by making a distinction between claiming anti-Zionist identity, and holding an anti-Zionist belief system, in order to establish their alignment with, and loyalty to, their Jewish family and community. Both Lisa, a lesbian in her late sixties whose been involved in Palestinian solidarity work for several decades, and Willa, an early thirties queer person who grew up in Berkeley, were in agreement that claiming anti-Zionist identity felt like positioning themselves against their family members and other Jewish people who claim Zionism; Willa describes, "I'm not against the people," while Lisa expands, "I preferred anti-Zion*ism,* rather than me being an anti-Zionist." Both Will and Lisa draw this distinction between identity and beliefs in response to the socially disruptive act of publicly aligning with anti-Zionism.

In addition to experiencing familial separation and isolation, participants describe isolation from their larger Jewish communities, in the form of violent exclusion from Jewish belonging. Several participants across age, gender, and sexual identity, described experiences of being called, “nazi’s,” “anti-semetic, and a self hating Jew,” as well as being called a “KAPO,” which is a term used to describe Jews who worked with German forces in concentration camps, implying that participants are actively conspiring for the demise of Jewish people by being anti-Zionist. Participants elaborated on their explicit experiences of exclusion from American Jewish community due to their anti-Zionist positioning and beliefs. Ben describes the experience of being “black-balled in a very public space” by the Rabbi of his previous congregation, forcing him to resign from his synagogue and Jewish community. The isolation Ben experienced was so intense that it was a part of his decision to relocate to the Bay Area, with the hope of finding belonging in anti-Zionist Jewish community.

Most participants in the study, aside from one who had an anti-Zionist parent and one who had immense community support from leftist political groups, describe isolation, separation, and fear as being a part of their experience of claiming anti-Zionism. Given the marginalization accompanying anti-Zionist position and identity (Minkin 2014) - meaning both the isolation that folks who hold this position experience, and the marginality of this belief system and politics within hegemonic American Jewish Zionism - what are participants' processes and pathways of arriving to anti-Zionist position and identity? The following sections will examine participants' various pathways and avenues to which they arrived to anti-Zionist politicization, including an analysis of what affirms people’s politics and keeps them rooted within this marginal position.

Pathways to anti-Zionist Politicization

Participants describe several processes through how they moved from the compulsory, Zionist "water" that American Jews navigate and swim within, as Willa describes it, to having clear and decisive anti-Zionist politics, belief systems, and identities. The following analysis explores several key avenues that participants described that facilitated their movement away from Zionism towards anti-Zionism. First, I explore proximity to Palestinian people as a central and consistent avenue towards anti-Zionist politics. Second, I situate this proximity within the context and ongoing openings created through the intersection of participant's varying identities, focusing mainly on the interaction of being queer and Jewish.

Proximity to Palestine & to Palestinian People

Traveling to Israel/Palestine, forming connections with Palestinian people, and learning about Israeli state violence enacted on Palestinians were consistent through-lines in participants' avenues towards anti-Zionism. This varying proximity, either interpersonally or geographically, happened for participants in several ways; either through individual, face-to-face discussion with Palestinian folks, either in the US or in Israel/Palestine; through organized travel to Israel through "peace groups" or through the Birthright trip and organization; and through on-line realms - images of Israeli violence in Palestine, through forum posts sites such as Reddit, and through news exposing Israeli violence.

Oak, a non-binary, lesbian participant in their early 20s, describes that they grew up alongside a Palestinian family in Berkeley and were good friends with the family's daughter. Through these interpersonal relationships, they established the connection of Palestine to Palestinian people, rather than learning or feeling any sense of American Jewish entitlement and

ownership to Palestinian land. Oak later describes their sense of confusion upon arriving in American Jewish Youth groups such as BBYO. Oak explains, “these people are really serious about Israel,” which was confusing to them, since they had never learned a prior connection to Palestinian land as a part of being Jewish.

Within the Knesset law of the Right to Return, any Jewish person is welcome and guaranteed citizenship in Israel, and maintains high freedom of mobility in regard to traveling to and spending time in Israel/Palestine. This freedom of Jewish mobility in Israel is in direct contrast to restriction of Palestinian movement in Israel, Palestine, and in occupied territories. Since the 1948 Nakba, when 750,000 Palestinian peoples were forcibly removed from their ancestral lands and homes, Palestinian movement has been highly restricted and policed in Israel/Palestine. Not only are Palestinians surveilled and policed while moving through their ancestral lands, either to cross the security barriers to work in Israel, or while moving through Gaza and the West Bank, but diasporic Palestinians are entirely restricted and blocked from their land and homes. Palestinian peoples are unable to return to their home and lands, while Jewish people are not just welcomed, but are encouraged to spend time in Israel, move to Israel, and to become Israeli citizens. A heavily funded aspect of Zionist propaganda is providing opportunities for Jewish people to travel to Israel for *free*: all while Palestinian peoples are militaristically blocked from returning to their homes, and are policed and surveilled into highly restricted movement while remaining in Palestine. Encouraging American Jews to spend time in Israel as a central part of the Zionist machine is reflected in participants’ experiences.

However, these trips and travel experiences aided in participants' processes in moving towards anti-Zionism. Both Willa, mentioned earlier, and Moe, a mid-thirties queer and trans

person who grew up in a Bay Area suburb, describe Birthright, the name of both an organization and the free two week trip to Israel that it provides for global Jewish populations, as cracking through Zionist depictions of Israeli and Jewish relationships to the land. Willa explains: “I think the most formative thing and the first thing for me, was going on this Birthright trip —- there was just a total denial of other people's truths in history.” Moe echoes the role of Birth Right in their politicization process, describing, “I actually did end up doing Birthright, I would say regrettably, but I actually feel like that gave me a lot of data and knowledge now that I wouldn’t have otherwise.” Allie also explains that before their Birthright trip, their friend gave them a disclaimer and warning which shaped her experience:

> I had a friend who was Palestinian and he told me when I went, don’t believe anything they say, and I went and I feel like [Palestine] just wasn’t brought up, and I had so many questions, and I started researching about it and educating myself about it when I went home.

Both Ben and Mira, a mid-twenties queer person who grew up in Atlanta and has been living in the Bay Area for several years, traveled to Israel for different types of organized trips, and on those trips met and interpersonally connected with Palestinian people. While on a Non-Violent Communication Frisbee trip, intended to spark dialogue between American Jews, Israeli Jews, and Palestinians, Mira explains, “I went to Israel/Palestine that summer and worked at the camp, and was hosted by some friends that I met in Tamara, and met their families, and they really really were like generous with welcoming me into their space…. and that was a big turning point for me.” Ben echoes this sentiment in explaining how his ongoing and personal connections with Palestinian people he met while traveling to Israel/Palestine directly led to the formation of his anti-Zionist position: “ I spent a lot of time with Palestinians and eventually I just realized that liberal Zionism was a failure and became anti-Zionist.”

Another throughline that participants experienced was becoming witness to and unveiling Israeli state violence enacted on Palestinian people. Both Moe and Lisa describe different moments of Israeli state violence as initiating their desire to learn more about Zionism, and to become active in anti-Zionist movements. Nina, a queer/lesbian, non-binary person in their early 20s who is a first-generation, Russian Jew, born and raised in San Francisco, reflects on their experience of unpacking normalized Zionist violence, alongside seeing images and reading accounts by Palestinian people online. Nina reflected on the common Zionist justification of use of force, of accusing Palestinian people as using, "human shields," to make Israel look bad for inciting violence. While discussing a 2011 attack on Gaza with their friend in high school, Nina brought up the defensive notion of "human shields," to which their friend asked - "Nina - do you hear yourself?" This prompted Nina to initiate discussions with their family, and to seek information online to better understand the violence and attacks from the perspective of Palestinian people. Proximity to Palestine and to Palestinian people serving as a consistent initiator towards anti-Zionist politics for many participants, demonstrates the total erasure of Palestinian people and history that Zionism perpetuates and relies on. Interpersonal relationships creating such a meaningful opening for participants to move towards anti-Zionism also demonstrates the deep dehumanization of Palestinian people and lives that Zionism creates and maintains.

For most participants, this critical Palestinian proximity happened within the context of other identity formation processes that helped shepherd them towards anti-Zionism. Nancy, an early 70s, Jewish lesbian feminist scholar and longtime political activist, who's been leading anti-Zionist Jewish organizing for nearly three decades, reflects on Palestinian proximity as a critical

turning point towards her anti-Zionism, which happened in conjunction with and through other identity and political formation processes. Though Nancy initially felt resistant to acknowledge and personally confront Israeli state violence while newly embracing her Jewish identity, spending time in Palestine and meeting Palestinian women and Israeli women Peace activists transformed her life and her politics. Though meeting Palestinian women and learning about their lives and experiences was a catalyst in Nancy's journey, this avenue of politicization initially became available to her through being a lesbian. Her lesbian identity and the leftist politicization that accompanied her coming into this position foregrounded her Judaism to eventually align it with anti-Zionism. For Nancy, and many of the participants in this research, Zionist sponsored trips to Israel led to interpersonal connection and questioning, which eventually became a central part of folks' process towards anti-Zionism. However, like Nancy, this proximity happened within the larger context and ongoing consciousness raising process that was facilitated through the intersection of participants' specific and core identities. Nancy's experience serves as an example of a consistent dynamic observed in the focus groups, in which the intersection of certain identities creates openings towards anti-Zionist politicization.

Opening Avenues Through Intersecting Identities

While reflecting on their politicization process towards claiming being an anti-Zionist Jew, Nina describes almost a sense of confusion and lack of understanding in arriving to this position. Nina explains,

> for a very long time I wondered, why am I an anti-Zionist? And I'm like the only person in my family who's so aggressively anti-Zionist. Like, my sisters are not Zionists in any way, but are just not as like, they just don't care as much, they're not politically active. My parents are still like, I would say, like right wing Zionists. And like I grew up with other Russian speaking Jews, and even those who are queer - the majority of the ones

> who are queer are still Zionists. So, I've been trying to like figure out for a very long time, and like, why did I turn out the way that I did? - and I don't really have a clear answer to that.

Nina's questioning gets at a core component of this research and of political work at large. How do people move away from hegemonic, violent norms and belief systems, especially when those norms are ingrained within one's family system and cultural background? Within the context of such pervasive and omnipresent Zionism, Nina's questioning demonstrates a sense of almost confusion, or lack of clarity, around what distinguishes them in viscerally connecting with the desire to push back against and refuse Zionism. Nina compares themself to their sisters, who don't feel the same extent of urgency and connection to anti-Zionism, and even to other queer Jewish people in their Russian-Jewish community, for whom queerness did not initiate a fissure from Zionist consciousness and politics. Politically concerned with a similar line of questioning, the following data analysis explores the intersections of specific identities and positions that brought participants to anti-Zionism by creating an opening towards new possibilities of being and of differently assuming their identities and political positioning. These intersections form various avenues that created an affective and felt sense of separation from Zionism, allowing participants to move towards their current anti-Zionist politics and identities.

Queerness & Judaism

Queerness, both as relating to participant's genders and sexualities, initiated a felt sense of separation from hegemonic Zionist Jewish culture, becoming a part of folks' process towards anti-Zionism. Though one participant, Lisa, explicitly feels no connection between being a lesbian and her inclination towards anti-Zionism, while retrospectively discussing their processes, many participants did express queerness as being a part of their pathways. For most

participants across age, being queer created visceral moments of disconnection from Jewish culture and spaces, which became a central part of their process. Nina and Oak, both non-binary queer people in their early 20s, reflect on feeling isolated in organized Jewish community spaces specifically in regards to their queer positioning and identities. While recalling BBYO, a popular, national Jewish youth group with chapters across the country, Oak describes, “I can talk for hours about how heteronormative and weird it was,” and that they eventually, “dropped out because [their fellow cohort members] were all straight,” and were, “all super into Israel.” While recounting the same youth group (BBYO), Nina credits not having participated within it as a central reason to having been able to have formed their own opinions and relationship to Israel. Nina explains,

> I think like feeling alienated from Jewish spaces to begin with, and also like not really experiencing the kind of like make Jewish babies atmosphere that is so predominant in American Jewish spaces. So I never did like BBYO, I never went on birthright, and so for me, like having, like multiple rifts away from mainstream, American, Jewish, culture, was really important for me.

Both Nina and Oak explicitly identify heteronormativity as a central organizing factor of American Jewish culture, and as a part of more formal organized American Jewish spaces. Charlie, a late-sixties lesbian identified queer person, who grew up in Brooklyn and currently lives in the American South, elaborates on this connection of heteronormativity as forming Jewish cultural norms and expectations. Charlie explains that she knew pretty clearly as a kid, that she didn't want to become, “typical Brooklyn Jewish,” meaning, “I don't wanna grow up… and then get married.” Charlie’s identification of the expectation of marriage as a central component of her Jewish upbringing is emblematic of the heteronormativity ingrained within American Jewish culture. Continuing to expose straightness within American Jewish culture,

Willa identifies the realization of compulsory heteronormativity through her processes of coming into her bisexuality with that of compulsory Zionism. Willa sees these two processes - of coming into queerness and coming into anti-Zionism - as following similar arcs, in response to gaining awareness of the compulsory nature of both heteronormativity and Zionism. Willa explains her process of realizing, "'Oh, my gosh!' everything is, we're so conditioned to be straight and just like we're so conditioned to be, or I was so conditioned to be Zionist in a very implicit way, and it's not like a loud political project, it's just in the water for both of them." Understanding heteronormativity and Zionism as compulsory gave Willa space and awareness to question her alignment with both. Nina elaborates on this experience, by explaining that once they came more into their queerness, positioning them outside of Jewish norms and expectations of heteronormativity, they felt more ability and mobility in moving away from Zionism norms. Nina describes, "I was like well, I already don't fit in there [being straight], like to me it just becomes a lot easier. Like once you already open up that box, it becomes a lot easier to be like oh actually this doesn't make sense to me, I don't fit here, this is fucked up." For these participants, their queerness made them experience separation and disconnection from heteronormative American Judaism. Though this separation in itself did not directly lead folks to anti-Zionism, it served as a part of a larger process in seeking alternative modes of Judaism, and in feeling disconnected from normative - *Zionist* - Jewish community.

Queer*ing* Judaism

For many participants in this research, the intersection of queerness and Judaism created space and separation from normative Jewish culture, which structurally relies on cis-heteronormativity. The interaction of these two positions - being queer and Jewish -

simultaneously opened another avenue towards anti-Zionist politicization. Extending queerness from one's sexual orientation to the assuming non-normative positioning, participants used the interaction of being queer and Jewish to *queer* Judaism. *Queering* as a verb, describes a relational positioning of non-normativity within the context of hegemonic norms. Within this analysis, the various acts of what I'm categorizing as "queering Judaism" that participants describe, indicates the ways that participants create and find ways to be Jewish that are non-normative, within the context of Zionist, cis-heteronormative American Jewish culture. Alex elaborated on this process in describing:

> I think that queerness is about in large part rejecting the dominant society and narrative and structure, so I think like wanting to rebuild a life and existence that rejects the dominant narrative, so I think thats like mirrored in a lot of ways in the rejection of like institutional Zionism and like being more open to sort of like constructing and alternate.

Queerness affects participants' experience of belonging within Judaism, and from that position of isolation, participants queer, or change and alter, what Judaism means to them, in order to make it more accessible. The following analysis identifies several consistent acts through which participants queer their Judaism; queerness as related to the act of Jewish questioning; queerness as transitioning Judaism from a natural to a chosen identity; and queerness as identifying, and longing to change, cycles of Jewish harm and trauma.

Queerness & Questioning

A number of participants directly connect their queerness to their Judaism through the act of questioning, which they attribute as a core component of both identities. Seriously considering questioning as an ongoing, necessary, and political act, which both anchors their queerness and their Judaism, creates space to recognize and question Zionist cultural norms for folks in this

study. Within Judaism, the act of questioning - literally meaning the act of asking "why" - is a central aspect of Jewish religiosity and culture. Asking "why" to spark discussion, to gain deeper understanding, and to question naturalized power systems, are all values of Jewish culture and religion. However, within Zionist Judaism, this act of cultural Jewish questioning is limited. Despite being held as a central Jewish value, this act of Jewish questioning is halted while turned towards Zionism. Nina demonstrates the limits of Jewish questioning of Zionism while recounting this exchange with their family:

> And I remember coming back to my parents and being like [the Zionist argument of Palestinian "human shields"] doesn't make any sense. And then just like having it be like immediately, like dead, in like this was not a conversation that we're continuing, and I've never experienced that, just like the only word that's coming to mind is like violent reaction from my family on a subject because like, we're Jews, we like usually love to argue and discuss and debate and blah blah blah. But this was like not up for discussion, not up for debate.

Questioning Zionism is often met with silence, denial, shame, and isolation of the questioner. Drawing from their experiences of questioning, or challenging and feeling outside of or against cis-heteronormativity as queer and trans people, participants queer this act of Jewish questioning, to push back against the assumed and normalized Jewish belief in Zionism. Moe explains that, "active questioning is also so Jewish and so queer," and thoroughly questioning normative modes of being helped shepherd them towards anti-Zionist politics. Mira describes that to her, being Jewish and being queer both spiral around, "being willing to ask 'why' and actually like being rigorous with that." Both Nina and Simone continue to echo this sentiment. Nina defined queerness in part as, "queer as in, like, you know, questioning everything around you like questioning all these norms," while Simone names, "the act of questioning for me, is central to being Jewish and to being queer." To use Mira's language, the act of rigorously asking,

"why," even and especially in response to normalized and assumed Zionism, is a foundational practice of both Jewish and queer positions for these participants. Participants draw from their queer positions to queer this notion of Jewish questioning, using this act that normally stops at Zionism, to push through Zionist silencing, in order to more authentically, and with integrity, continually come back to the question of, "why?" - specifically and especially in regards to Zionism, and all of the cultural manufacturing required to maintain and normalize the violent ideology. Queerness continues to shift participants' relationships to Judaism by making their relationships to their Jewish identities an active choice rather than a passive position they inherent and assume.

First Lesbians, then Jewish: Queer identity transitioning Judaism

Several participants describe their very similar experiences of their queer sexualities transforming their Judaism from being an ascribed to a chosen identity. Through an investigation of Muslim religiosity in pre and post 9/11 America among Muslim college students, religious scholar Lori Peek (339: 2005) argues that religious identity formation is an ongoing, dynamic process, rather than a static one, through the identity transformation from what she describes as ascribed to chosen. Ascribed religious identity indicates an identity formation stage in which individuals experience their religion as an ascribed characteristic of themselves and within their social worlds, and in which they engage in little self reflection of their religion and religious identity (Peek 336: 2005). Ascribed religious identity is related to cultural normativity, in that this naturalization of religious identity is in direct relationship with cultural understandings that normalize it. Peek explores how over time, religious identity may transition to being a chosen identity, in which individuals choose that identity as a distinct aspect of their sense of self.

While reflecting on their politicization pathways towards being anti-Zionist Jews, Nancy and Charlie, both late 60s lesbians who came of age politically through anti-Vietnam war organizing, through civil rights solidarity work, and later through the Women's Liberation Movement, describe very similar processes of their changing Jewish identity. Nancy, whose first political home was in Washington D.C., in which she was deeply enmeshed in leftist, socialist, and communist organizing, and Charlie, who grew up in Brooklyn and moved to Durham, North Carolina in her early 20s, and has been engaged in political work there since, both describe being lesbians as a core component of coming into their Jewish identity. Charlie remarks, "you know, and I didn't really even identify very much as a Jew until I came out as a lesbian." In a separate interview, Nancy echoes a similar sentiment by recounting, "I often say I came to my Jewishness through my lesbian-ness." Nancy elaborates, ""I mean, I definitely considered myself Jewish [prior to coming out as a lesbian], but I never would have foregrounded it, it didn't occur to me." Charlie offers more insight by explaining:

> it wasn't like I hid being Jewish, but I didn't really claim it so much for myself in, uhm, relationship to other people… I think that when I came out as a lesbian it kind of made me think more about who are my identities? What are my identities, and who am I? And what does that mean? ….. and so I just think it was part of that, was claiming my identity, and so that's kind of what I meant by that.

Nancy and Charlie's descriptions reflect their lesbian identities creating an opening of both awareness and space, to transition their Jewishness from being ascribed identities, to an identity position which they actively choose. Both Nancy and Charlie additionally describe coming into their lesbian-ness as a larger part of their political consciousness raising towards leftist and progressive politics. Choosing Jewish identity through the avenue of their lesbian positions allowed both Nancy and Charlie to step into being Jewish while in alignment with their whole

selves. Rather than being a compartmentalized identity, their Judaism is foregrounded by and accessed through their non-normative, lesbian sexual identities and the leftist politics their sexual identities are connected to. Nancy describes the joy in this shift, and in coming into Jewish identity specifically through her lesbian, feminist political community:

> And when I was, this was 1982... in California, but maybe other places, they started having these Jewish feminist conferences, and I was like, oh, my God! This is where I come from! This is who I am, and these are my people. And it was very powerful. So that was the beginning. So [claiming Jewishness] came totally through my lesbian-ness.

Whereas Nancy and Charlie describe their lesbian-ness as transitioning their Jewish identity from being ascribed to chosen, other participants describe anti-Zionism itself, and learning about it as a political option, as initiating this shift.

Possibility of being an Anti-Zionist Jew

Reflected across the experiences of intergenerational participants in this research, anti-Zionism as being a distinct identity rather than a political position, seems to be a more recent identity formation. Elder participants in their 60s and 70s recount changing language to describe the positions of both Palestinian solidarity work and of being opposed to a Jewish state. Nancy and Lisa describe previous language for shifting political goals in response to Zionism. Nancy explains that in the 80s, a progressive line and idea among American circles engaging in Palestinian solidarity work was, “2 states for 2 people,” which, over the course of decades, shifted to “anti-occupation work” or “Palestinian solidarity work.” Participants in their 20s, and particularly in their early 20s, seemed to more readily claim and have more understanding of “anti-Zionism” as a distinct and more widely known political identity and position. Whereas Nancy and Charlie transitioned their Jewish identity from ascribed to chosen through the avenue

of their lesbian-ness, eventually positioning them to claim anti-Zionism as a key part of their Jewish identities later in their lives, younger participants had access to the notion of anti-Zionist identity itself and claimed it to transition their Jewishness to chosen positions. Nina's experience of reading a Jewish anti-Zionist Tumblr post demonstrates this identity formation shift:

> the moment that I saw a Jewish person identify as anti-Zionist [on tumblr], that was it for me. Because I was like, oh, like this is actually a possibility like, I don't actually need to be a Zionist, because until that point the two had been like totally coupled for me, like there was no possibility of those identities existing separately for me. And then, once it was clear that they could, I was like, Oh, yeah, I'm not a Zionist, duh.

Understanding being anti-Zionist as a political possibility, and being able to claim anti-Zionism while still maintaining their Jewishness, made coming into this politic possible for Nina. Nina still connects the formation of their queer identity and anti-Zionist identity, by explaining, "I mean, I don't know which came first, but like for me - they [queerness and anti-Zionism] like definitely came hand in hand," but anti-Zionism is ultimately what allowed them to transition their Jewish identity to be in alignment with their values and political imagination. For most participants across generation and age, queering Judaism through the various acts described in the proceeding sections helped facilitate a shift of Judaism moving from an ascribed to a chosen identity. While for some participants, becoming anti-Zionists itself is what transformed, or queered, their inherent Jewishness. Most participants sought this shift out of necessity, in order to reconcile with the violence of Zionism, while still maintaining their Jewish identity, which every participant in the study described as a core aspect of their sense of self.

Transforming Judaism as a Core Identity

Part of participants' pathways to anti-Zionism was born of a desire to maintain being Jewish, a central component of how participants understand themselves and their social worlds,

while being in alignment with their politics and values opposing extreme state violence. Every participant described being Jewish as a "distinct and prominent identity," to use Willa's words, and as a central part of their sense of self. Most participants explain their Jewishness as cultural rather than religious, and all participants described being Jewish as a key part of their upbringing, as a distinct cultural experience, and as a central position that connects them with their families, lineage, and ancestry. Participants have different avenues and processes of how they arrived to anti-Zionism, yet many share this arrival as part of a need to reconcile with how to maintain their Jewishness while it remains tied to the unimaginable violence of Zionism enacted on Palestinian peoples. Nancy describes this moment of recognition, in which it became clear to her that she had to face Zionism rather than continuing to turn away from it, if she wanted to continue to claim her Jewishness meaningfully and with integrity. While at a dance performance at a late 1980s art festival in the Bay Area, which Nancy was brought to by her lover who understood that she needed to confront Zionism, Nancy describes:

> And I sat there on the grass sobbing, and I thought, I have to believe - this is a very visceral experience - I have to believe I can still feel good about being a Jew, and that I have to face whatever the Israeli Government's doing.

Turning towards Israeli state violence enacted on Palestinian peoples and meaningfully confronting it as a central component of Zionism as American Jews requires a reconfiguration of what it means to be Jewish. This moment became a central turning point for Nancy to move towards what she later describes as her anti-Zionist politics, even though that language wasn't a part of her organizing community's vernacular at the time. In the process of reconfiguring Judaism to maintain it as a central and core identity while confronting Zionism rather than

turning away from it, participants use their Jewishness to confront difficult, yet hypocritical cycles of harm as manifested in Israeli state violence, rather than turning away from it.

Queer Questioning to Disrupt Cycles of Harm

Several participants describe their processes of using the act of "queered" questioning to differently understand and engage with intergenerational Jewish trauma in order to end cycles of harm, rather than perpetuate state violence through Zionism. These participants explain this process of grappling with Jewish trauma being turned into Zionist state violence, and through the act of questioning connecting the two and longing for something different, as an important opening and avenue towards their anti-Zionist politics. While connecting the throughlines between cycles of harm - Jewish intergenerational trauma and Jewish state violence - Moe explains:

> And I also just feel like this - [Jewish people] have the holocaust, and then we have that trauma in our bodies, or I'll say this, trauma that is in my body as a Jewish - a descendant of people who were killed and people who survived the holocaust - and then I see other people in my family that are Zionist and living in Israel, and that are blowing that trauma through the bodies of Palestinians, and who are straight and hasidic, blah blah blah, and again, just like where is that, where does the thought of enacting harm and violence on another person's body come into play, and where have I done that internal work and where and when have I experienced that, and that is all related to queerness and questioning, and also just like the active questioning is also so Jewish and so queer.

Moe connects their lived, bodily, affective experience of their intersecting positions - of being queer, of being a living descendant of Jews who were murdered in the holocaust, of holding that trauma somewhere in their body - and holding and feeling overlapping forms of trauma and pain, to urgently questioning why Jews so readily meet the Zionist call to transfer that pain into state violence enacted on Palestinian lives. Here, Moe utilizes the act of queered Jewish questioning to question normalized Zionist violence, allowing them to confront and long to change cycles of

harm in response to internalized Jewish trauma. Zionism plays on very real experiences and holding of intergenerational Jewish trauma, convincing Jewish populations that Jewish safety relies on statehood, and without Israel, global Jewry will not survive.

Fear of annihilation has become ingrained as a central part of Jewish identity (Minkin: 2014). Several participants echoed this sentiment, by recalling fear of the non-Jewish other being a central part of their Jewish upbringing. Lisa explains, "I was born knowing the number 6 million. To be Jewish is to live in fear - fear of persecution, fear that it will happen again." Ben elaborates on this sentiment by describing:

> and you know I remember growing up, small town, a lot of non-Jews… and I remember being told as a kid, 'it's great that you're friendly with so and so, and that you go to their house and whatever, but don't trust them because they'll stab you in the back.' And that's the holocaust mentality. Both my parents were born early in the last century, and grew up with a lot of antisemitism, and there is a distrust and a fear, a deep-seated fear.

This fear of annihilation by the non-Jewish other remains present in many Jewish communities and families. Fear of the other is used as a scapegoat within interconnected systems of violence, such as white-supremacist patriarchy, to blame other groups or people for harm, rather than understanding violence and harm as institutional, and intentional components of interconnected power systems. Within this discussion of fear, it's important to note that all participants within this study are white, and fourteen out of fifteen participants are Askhenazi Jewish, meaning Jews of Eastern European descent. Fear of the other is a central organizing aspect of white-supremacy. Zionism is intrinsically tied to white-supremacy, in explicitly and violently prioritizing the safety of Ashkenazi, or white, Jewish people, while using racist logic to justify the brutalization of the Arab and Palestinian other, to condone and enforce an apartheid state. White-supremacist Zionism makes safety a zero-sum game, in which Jewish safety becomes contingent on settling

on Palestinian land, and in the process enacting immense harm and state violence on Palestinian peoples. The trauma that creates this fear among participants and their families is real, *and* fear of the other is both created by and is so easily and readily manipulated within overlapping systems of white-supremacist patriarchy to justify the necessity of violence on the other, in order to keep "us" safe. This fear is weaponized by the Zionist state of Israel to justify continuous harm and extreme violence enacted on Palestinian peoples, all in the name of Jewish safety. While reflecting on intergenerational trauma informing Zionist notions of Jewish safety through settler-colonial statehood, Mira identifies the hypocrisy of this notion of Jewish safety:

> I think Israel and a lot of Jews respond to the holocaust and the immense trauma and asking like, why did this happen? Like, Israel is the neatly tied little thing of we can be safe now because this exists. And it doesn't make us any safer. I think it probably makes us less safe because a lot of trauma and harm and violence is being enacted in our names and even if were participating or not, were enacting that…. I, at the end of Yad Vashem, which is the holocaust museum in Israel.. Palestine.. you walk out and there is this balcony, and it has this little outlook that is on to the west bank, I think, and you know, it ends saying, "never again, never again" and then you're looking at like, the occupied west bank, and it's like, I went there with my family when we were visiting my grandma's hometown, and I remember being so angry and so upset, and not about the holocaust… obviously about the holocaust… but like I wasn't – I was upset about the hypocrisy of it all, that we're going to sit with this and say never again, and just slip back into the cycle of enacting violence and trauma on other people so blindly, and I don't like, its, kind of incomprehensible sometimes, how like, how that can keep going.

For both Mira and Moe, seriously sitting with their own lineages of trauma, and using their queered notion of Jewish questioning to push back against the use of that harm in justifying extreme violence enacted Palestinian peoples, helped them both see past false Zionist notions of safety, and instead to long for something different that breaks cycles of harm, rather than seamlessly perpetuating them. Both Mira and Moe also credit this re-engagement with inter-generational Jewish trauma, and using the knowledge in that harm to demand for a safety rooted in solidarity, rather than using that harm to enact violence on other people, to their queerness.

Queerness as a means of questioning to push past the silencing effect of Zionism, and queerness as an route to demand safety rooted in solidarity, rather than notions of safety through violent statehood. Queerness created an opening for these participants to more critically, and with integrity, face and turn inwards towards the harm of Israeli state violence, and have the desire to sever Jewish trauma as a justification for that harm, clearing the way to move towards anti-Zionism. Willa, whose father was born in 1948 (the same year that Israel gained sovereignty) in a German Jewish refugee camp, by parents who escaped and survived the holocaust, pushes back against Zionism as a means towards meaningful Jewish healing. Understanding that Zionism will never heal trauma for her Jewish family and community, is what anchors her anti-Zionist politics. Willa explains:

> I think over time I've come to a place of like just really reckoning with the intergenerational trauma of the holocaust in my family, and like among the Jewish community at large, and just taking the stance of like I don't stand for [Zionism], because it is not a way that like reckons with that trauma in a way that feels in integrity to me, and it like doesn't do us a service to heal.

Meaningful healing of intergenerational Jewish trauma will not be achieved through Zionism. This knowledge and understanding in part affirms participants' anti-Zionist politics. Participants queer their relationship to Judaism through this act of queered questioning, extended to Zionism itself, and the specific assertion that Zionism is necessary to maintain Jewish safety.

Discussion

This thesis is one of the first research projects to explore subjective experiences and politicization processes towards anti-Zionism, through a qualitative investigation of the interaction of participants' queer, anti-Zionist, and Jewish positions. While most academic work on Zionism, anti-Zionism, gender and sexuality, and Jewishness (individually and at their intersections) is theoretical and/or historical, my study uses innovative qualitative methods of focus groups to form and generate knowledge from the starting point of of intergenerational participants' lived experiences, to better understand the interaction of queerness and Jewishness in moving people towards anti-Zionism over time. The focus groups served a dual purpose of data collection and provided a meaningful space for people who hold these positions to connect, deepen relationships, and create more queer, intergenerational, anti-Zionist Jewish community. My findings build upon and contribute new insights to current literature and suggest new strategies for, while affirming current work of anti-Zionist Jewish political organizing. This thesis also points to areas for further academic inquiry.

Summary of Findings & Implications

The participants within this study, all who self-identify as queer, Jewish, and anti-Zionist, arrived to their anti-Zionist politics through several avenues. The main avenues discussed are participant's proximity to Palestinian people and to Palestine itself, and through various openings created by the interaction of their queer and Jewish positions within the specific context of American Jewish community and spaces. The following explores the political implications of these findings, and offers how they may be applied to Jewish anti-Zionist organizing strategy and goals.

The findings in this work demonstrate that participants describe being anti-Zionist and Jewish as a unique position. Though some participants contest the identity categorization of "anti-Zionist," many claim it as an identity that they hold, and as a central aspect of their Jewish identity. Anti-Zionist becomes a modifier for being Jewish, and is attached to Jewish identity - making the participants not just Jewish, but anti-Zionist Jews. Identity can both be a powerful means of self-reclamation and community building, and can simultaneously be weaponized within the context of power systems that utilize categorization as a means to seek power for individual groups at the expense of interconnected liberation. The transformation of "anti-Zionist" to an identity position has political implications that must be considered in organizing and movement work. On one hand, all of the older participants in this study reflect that though still marginal, they notice a distinct cultural shift in which anti-Zionism as a political position, is gaining popularity and visibility. Carolyn, an older lesbian in her mid 70s, reflected back to the 20 year old participants in her focus group, "it seems as though you have the expectation that every queer Jew you meet will be anti-Zionist - which is great! - and very different than my experience." The increased popularity, accessibility, and visibility of anti-Zionist political positioning, among participants in their largely Bay Area communities, is positive in regards to bringing more people into anti-Zionist political organizing. However, with this shift to anti-Zionist identity alongside this increased popularity, there's the potential for anti-Zionism to become flattened, in regards to its material implication and impact for those who claim it.

If anti-Zionist is an identity position that is more widely claimed based on a belief system rather than in connection to material action, that may decouple this position from being rooted in material action to work towards Palestinian solidarity. Though not included in the analysis, the

material manifestation of participants anti-Zionist beliefs varied; some participants are long-time organizers and leaders specifically within the realms of this work, while some understand it more as a position to claim that is detached from material action. One on hand, Zionism is so hegemonic that claiming anti-Zionism may be a meaningful action for Jewish people within their communities - and this research indicates that merely claiming that position has material impact on participants' social and familial networks. However, we must be grounded in the reality that Zionism is most violent and harmful to the Palestinian people it displaces and brutalizes, and with that knowledge, anti-Zionism as being grounded in material action remains critical. Perhaps this is addressing two distinct, yet connected, aspects of political movement work - cultural work, such as changing cultural norms and conditions to make anti-Zionism a possibility and position more visible and accessible - and organizing work - organizing to transform material condition to better facilitate solidarity with and materially support the liberation of Palestinian people. As explored in this thesis, Zionism is contingent on sustaining and reproducing cultural narratives and norms, in order to establish and maintain a belief system that both invisibilizes and justifies Israeli state violence. Therefore, a cultural shift towards anti-Zionism - visibilizing and actively opposing this normalized violence in all of its cultural manifestations - is a crucial aspect of strategies towards ending the Israeli occupation of Palestine. This thesis brings to question the role of anti-Zionist identity as being a part of this cultural shift, without relying on identity as the central avenue to facilitate it. Identity as a means to liberation is useful and has the potential to flatten and defang movements - holding this awareness as anti-Zionism gains visibility and popularity is important.

The findings in this work demonstrate the potential usefulness of personal stake as an organizing tool to bring more American Jewish people into anti-Zionism. Participants' experiences demonstrate both their desire for the humanization and dignification of Palestinian people and lives as a central aspect of their anti-Zionist politics, and simultaneously show participants' personal stake in their desire to end Zionism. The notion of personal stake is a political tool and organizing strategy in the context of solidarity work, to move past organizing from the place of being an ally or accomplice, towards simultaneously understanding one's own personal stake in disrupting violent power systems, especially while holding positions of power and privilege in a given system. In the context of this research, Ashkenazi and white Jewish people are positioned to gain power and privilege from Zionism - though at an extremely violent cost, Zionism materially benefits white Jewish people through granting them material privileges and power through statehood. Participants identify their personal stake throughout the study, in recognizing that Zionism does not actually provide meaningful safety to Jewish people; that Zionism does not allow for the meaningful healing of their intergenerational Jewish trauma; that Zionism initiates familial and community separation in response to opposing its violence through anti-Zionism; and that Zionism relies on violent systems of cis-heteronormativity in maintaining state power, which, as queer and trans subjects, is misaligned and harmful. It could be useful to use this notion of personal stake, in the context of American Jewish solidarity work to end Israel's occupation of Palestine, and to bring more people into anti-Zionist political movements and organizing.

Lastly, in response to community and familial isolation that many participants describe as a part of their anti-Zionist politicization pathways, building an abundant and strong anti-Zionist

Jewish community is an important part of anti-Zionist political work. Having anti-Zionist Jewish community to be embraced by and land in, in the case of being isolated from one's family of origin and/or Jewish community at large, is an important component of anti-Zionist movement building that must be considered. Creating alternative family and community structures in response to familial isolation is a central component of queer community and experience that anti-Zionist movement work can draw on and learn from, and can draw from lineages of queer kinship and chosen family. Queer anti-Zionists may experience isolation from their communities of origin twofold - on the premise of both their queer position and in regards to their anti-Zionist politics. This further emphasizes the need for community building to be a central part of Jewish anti-Zionist organizing.

Affirming of & Departing from the Literature

The findings in this thesis both align with, and offer new information in regards to current literature on the themes and topics within this work. The analysis is consistent with Puar's notion of homonationalism (2007); Lober (2018) and Solomon's (2003) discussions of gender and sexuality in disconnecting Jewish people from Zionism; and Minkin's (2014) identification of anti-Zionism both pushing against and being outside of affective parameters of American Jewish belonging.

Though some participants' queer positioning misaligns them with Zionism, many participants named that they know queer Zionist Jews, that queerness bringing people to anti-Zionism is not a generalizable experience. This recognition of queer and trans Zionists demonstrates queer sexuality being folded into state formulations of nationalism. Though some

queer people, in this study largely queer people who are not cis-men and lesbians, use their queerness as a point to diverge from Zionism, many gay people experience their sexual positioning as a means of connection with Israeli nationalism. Expanding upon this, Solomon's historical analysis argues that within the context of patriarchal Zionism, gender and sexuality may become critical fault lines through which people feel disconnection, and then move towards anti-occupation, or anti-Zionist inclinations. Lober's work specifically explores the role of lesbian sexuality in dividing Jewish feminists in the Women's Liberation Movement, in aligning with supporting Israel and Jewish nationalism, or aligning against Israel and nationalism in all forms though connecting with a solidarity politic. The findings in this thesis affirm Solomon's and Lober's work, in demonstrating that participant's gender and sexuality positions initiated their anti-Zionist politicization processes. Across gender, age, and sexuality positions, participants' experiences overwhelmingly align with Minkin's findings, in claiming that anti-Zionism pushed many participants outside the parameters of Jewish belonging within their families and Jewish community.

This research departs from current literature in demonstrating new findings. The findings in this thesis point to changing social and cultural conditions in the United States, in which anti-Zionism may be gaining visibility and more popularity as a politics and political identity. This research is the first of its kind to use qualitative methods to investigate the particular interaction of queer, anti-Zionist, and Jewish identity, revealing how theoretical and historical inquiries show up in participants' lived, subjective experiences. This includes participants' experience revealing their anti-Zionist politics as a "coming out"; the various ways that participants queer their Judaism in order to align with anti-Zionism (through the act of questioning, while

interrogating and wanting to change cycles of trauma, by foregrounding their Jewishness with their queer and lesbian positions); and the critical role of proximity to Palestinian people and land as an important point in folks' processes towards anti-Zionism.

Limits of exploratory research

The findings within this exploratory, non-generalizable research are limited in regards to participants' race and gender positions. As discussed in the methods and analysis sections, all participants within this study are white, and fourteen out of fifteen hold are women, femmes, trans, and non-binary - meaning they are queer people who aren't cis-men. There are vast and varying cultural and ethnic traditions, populations, and practices within both American Jewish populations, and global Jewry at large. This study specifically offers insights in how to move white, and mainly Ashkenazi American Jewish people towards anti-Zionism, and the same process may not translate to BIPOC Jewish people, and/or Jewish people with non-Ashkenazi cultural and religious practices. Similarly, this study mainly explores the experiences of queer people who are not cis-men. Since Zionism is a deeply patriarchal system, cis-men's experiences of arriving to anti-Zionism may be different, and may reveal different processes towards politicization, while confronting the power they gain through Zionist masculine gender positions. Lastly, an essential limit to consider are limitations of queer sexuality and gender positions themselves in moving people to align with anti-Zionism.

To name it plainly, the interaction of queerness and Judaism does not lead all queer people towards anti-Zionism. Through Israeli state efforts of pinkwashing and the ongoing phenomena of homonationalism, certain Jewish queer subjects are folded into Israeli nationalism, and in turn, align with Zionism. There are many queer Jewish Zionists, whose queer identity does not create apparent personal conflict with their Zionism, and instead connects them to Israeli statehood. While reflecting on the changing dynamics and tolerance of queer people among American Jewish community within his lifetime, Ben recounts, "reformed, reconstructionist, and conservative, are now you know very open to queer people, most of them ordained women Rabbis, queer Rabbis, so in that sense, the community has been more welcoming of queerness than it has of anti-zionists." As shifting nationalist formulations and dynamics make American Jewish community more open to queer people, queerness does not indicate one's political position towards Israel and Zionism. Lisa affirms this notion, by making clear that in her experience of a lesbian, anti-Zionist Jew, she, "[doesn't] really connect the queerness and the anti-Zionism [positions] at all." This divide along the lines of queer identity and positioning, in which queerness viscerally does or does not connect Jewish subjects with a desire for Jewish statehood, calls in larger, shifting national dynamics of queer people aligning with the state through homonationalism, or insisting on a queerness that seeks safety outside of statehood and which is rooted in solidarity.

Suggestions for future research

The findings in this thesis indicate various topics for future research regarding Zionism, Jewishness, gender and sexuality, and anti-Zionism. Suggested topics include an exploration of

the meaning of anti-Zionist identity as it relates to material action towards Palestinian solidarity and liberation work. In other words, how do people understand and experience their anti-Zionism as it relates to material action? In conjunction to these questions are topics regarding changing cultural conditions that elicit anti-Zionist identity formation, and anti-Zionist identity formation processes. Within the context of Zionism as a patriarchal system, further research exploring how men in particular arrive to anti-Zionism may be fruitful to unveil additional politicization pathways. Research into different Jewish cultural and racial groups, and relationships to Zionism and anti-Zionism among Jewish people's who are non-white and non-Ashkenazi is also needed, both to decenter Ashkenazim and to better understand how whiteness wraps people into Zionist logic, culture, and rule. Research into the experiences and meaning making of queer and trans Jewish Zionists is also important, in order to better understand mechanisms of Pinkwashing and homonationalism. In general, qualitative methods that generate knowledge from participants' lived experiences as the starting point are greatly missing from investigation of these topics, and are crucial in better understanding, and breaking down Zionism, and moving towards different, more just worlds and futures.

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